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Abstract

Over the last decade even as Salman Rushdie has been receiving accolades from the literary world, there has been a simultaneous stream of criticism about his representations of South Asian women. Charu Verma complains about "Midnight's Children's sexist bias against Padma [the protagonist Saleem Sinai's companion] ... who is projected as a pathetic victim' (60), while Sukeshi Kamra writes that 'Rasheed [Haroun and the Sea of Stories] is the victim of three female forces [the moon, his wife, and an allegorical Mother India], all of whom he desires and all of whom castrate him' (243). Inderpal Grewal observes that the women presented in *Shame* are 'passive, ineffectual or mediators of male power' (30) and Aijaz Ahmad adds that in *Shame* 'We find ... a gallery of women who are frigid and desexualised ... demented and moronic ... dulled into nullity ... driven to despair ... or suicide ... or [who] embody sheer surreal incoherence and loss of individual identity' (1992b 144). All four of these critics clearly demonstrate that within Rushdie's allegorical scheme of the postcolonial nation, women are only allowed to be victims of the excesses of the nation or victimisers who, like Sufiya Zenobia in *Shame*, have suffered so much at the hands of the patriarchal nation-state that they become corrupted oppressors themselves.

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Over the last decade even as Salman Rushdie has been receiving accolades from the literary world, there has been a simultaneous stream of criticism about his representations of South Asian women. Charu Verma complains about '*Midnight's Children's* sexist bias against Padma [the protagonist Saleem Sinai's companion] ... who is projected as a pathetic victim' (60), while Sukeshi Kamra writes that 'Rasheed [*Haroun and the Sea of Stories*] is the victim of three female forces [the moon, his wife, and an allegorical Mother India], all of whom he desires and all of whom castrate him' (243). Inderpal Grewal observes that the women presented in *Shame* are 'passive, ineffectual or mediators of male power' (30) and Aijaz Ahmad adds that in *Shame* 'We find ... a gallery of women who are frigid and desexualised ... demented and moronic ... dulled into nullity ... driven to despair ... or suicide ... or [who] embody sheer surreal incoherence and loss of individual identity' (1992b 144). All four of these critics clearly demonstrate that within Rushdie's allegorical scheme of the postcolonial nation, women are only allowed to be victims of the excesses of the nation or victimisers who, like Sufiya Zenobia in *Shame*, have suffered so much at the hands of the patriarchal nation-state that they become corrupted oppressors themselves.

Some of the factors influencing Rushdie's problematic treatment of women can be traced to the allegorical mode he uses. Rushdie's consistent conflation of individual with national destiny reinforces Jameson's warning to the 'first-world'¹ reader that 'third-world literature' should *not* be read as stories about individuals but as allegories about nation-states.² However, unlike the works by Lu Xun and Ousmane Sembane that Jameson examines, Rushdie's literary texts are implicated in a postmodern consciousness that allows him to play with the allegorical form itself and emphasise its limitations. For instance, he has his narrator in *Shame* point to 'an allegorical overlay that suppresses other [gendered] histories — a palimpsest that obscures what lies beneath' (91). Yet, even as Rushdie's narrator overtly sympathises with the women characters in *Shame*, he co-opts their histories into a national allegory, which says more about the atrocities perpetrated by postcolonial nation-states than about female subjectivity and desire.

Rushdie's self-conscious use of the allegorical form can be theorised in the context of arguments made by postcolonial critics against Jameson's problematic contention that 'all third-world literature must necessarily be read as national allegory' (69). Aijaz Ahmad, for instance, points out that Jameson's generalisations

about the 'third world' elide differences between and within third-world nations, ignore the presence of third-world pockets within the 'First world', and completely silence large bodies of third-world texts that do not fit the category of national allegory (1992a 104–110, 122). Ahmad also mentions that while Jameson describes 'First' and 'Second' worlds according to their modes of production, he 'defines the so-called Third world in terms of its 'experience of colonialism and imperialism', [and therefore] the political category that necessarily follows from this is that of "the nation"' (98). Feminist critic Lydia Liu reiterates that Jameson's theory of third-world literature favours a 'nation-oriented and male-centered practice of literary criticism' (46).

Despite their moments of self-consciousness and their parodic reflections on the limitations of the allegorical form, Rushdie's narratives, for the most part, tend to fit the Jamesonian paradigm of national allegory. Consequently, like Jameson, Rushdie can be criticised for presenting first-world readers with narratives that privilege the metaphors of colonialism and nationalism to the detriment of other voices. Josna Rege points out:

Recent feminist research on the colonial construction of Indian nationalism has demonstrated the extent to which 'traditional' conceptions of Indian womanhood have been bound up with the nationalist project. Women's experiences in the postcolonial period have shown, again and again, that their interests are incompatible with the interest of the nation-state ... In general, minorities and women writers, who have found that the exclusive discourse of nation cannot be made to tell their story, have been less likely to employ the narrative of the nation. (367)

In this essay I will examine Rushdie's allegorical treatment of the postcolonial nation alongside his representations of South Asian womanhood in *East, West Stories* (1994). It is my contention that while the women in *East, West* fall prey to the constraints of the allegorical form that encloses their narratives, they mark a departure from their earlier counterparts in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. On a characterological level, the women are brave, independent, and intelligent and do not easily fit into the victim/victimiser binary found in the earlier texts. On an allegorical level, even as these women remain the 'the object ... of Rushdie's narrator's [and, by extension, the postcolonial nation-state's] literary and sexual desires' (Kamra 245), instead of consistently reinscribing those desires, the textual representations of women in *East, West* sometimes interrogate and point towards the limitations of the patriarchal gaze that encloses them. Like Jameson, I think it is important to alert the first-world reader to the allegorical dimension of these postcolonial texts and like Ahmad and Liu, I think it is necessary to be aware of the limitations of the nation-centered narrative that Rushdie writes. I believe, like Sukeshi Kamra, that in Rushdie's narratives women do 'not exist except by negation and resistance to patriarchal naming' (247), but I also feel that these patterns of negation and resistance are worth exploring. While pointing out the various ways in which Rushdie's use of

allegory informs and limits his narratives, my discussion also seeks to privilege those moments in these stories that strain against the allegorical form that he employs. Consequently, my discussion shows how the stories in *East, West* both continue and depart from Rushdie's narrative excesses in his earlier works.

The absence of much critical scholarship on *East, West*³ suggests that readers have been taken in by the surface simplicity of these stories and have been content with either reading them characterologically and applauding Rushdie's vision of South Asian womanhood, or dismissing their allegorical treatment of the nation as necessarily limiting in its representations of gender. In this essay I would like to conflate both the above approaches by examining the different ways in which Rushdie's representation of South Asian womanhood is complicit with patriarchal allegories of the nation-state even as it questions and critiques the latter. Although the entire collection *East, West* can be read, as its title suggests, as an allegory for the colonial/postcolonial encounter between India and England, for the purpose of this paper which delineates the subjecthood of South Asian women, I will restrict my reading to the sections entitled 'East' and 'East, West'.

Situated as they are against the backdrop of postcolonial India, Pakistan, and/or England, each of the stories in these sections introduces a trope of modernity that threatens to contain gendered desire and identity. For instance, in 'Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies' Miss Rehana's visit to the British Consulate becomes symbolic of the vast numbers of South Asians who went to Great Britain to work as cheap labor in the post-World War II years. In 'The Courter' Certainly-Mary's identity is threatened by the middle-class narrator's immigrant desires and by the racist rhetoric spouted by politicians like Enoch Powell. 'The Harmony of the Spheres' emphasises the role played by the native woman's body in Eliot Crane's modernist impulse to fuse East and West, while *Star Trek* consumes the desires of the male and female characters in 'Chekov and Zulu'. In 'The Prophet's Hair' the sacred relic belonging to the Prophet Muhammad is implicated in discourses of religious fanaticism that threaten to destroy women's rights as well as the secular nature of the postcolonial nation, and in 'The Free Radio' Ramani, the rickshaw-puller, is seduced by the 'thief's widow' who symbolises the glamour of Bollywood and the promise of technology.

My essay, however, reveals that woman's desire sometimes resists containment by modernity. In 'Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies' and the 'Harmony of the Spheres', postcolonial gendered desire is found to lie outside colonial and national allegories. In 'The Courter' Certainly-Mary's desires threaten to disrupt the narrator's sense of place and identity and Certainly-Mary, like Zulu's wife in 'Chekov and Zulu', actively rewrites the virtual reality of electronic media. However, when women begin to acquire voice and agency they threaten narrative structures, and are consequently, returned 'home' to stories with a tighter allegorical framework that silence their dissident voices. In two out of the six stories under discussion — 'The Prophet's Hair' and 'The Free Radio' — female desire is

completely swallowed up by the religious implications associated with the theft of the hair and by the Emergency⁴ rhetoric of Ramani's letter home. When read together as a whole the six stories illustrate both the ways in which female desire is contained by allegorical structures as well as the manner in which textual desires confront and challenge allegorical representation.

Since Rushdie's reading of women's bodies operates within a theoretical framework which privileges colonialism and nationalism as the definitive tropes of postcolonial experience, an interpretation of these stories is best served by a look at the ways in which symbolic readings of native women's bodies originated in colonial India. It is my belief that the roots of Rushdie's allegorical reading of women's bodies as sites of contention between East and West can be traced to the conflict between colonial and national discourses about Indian womanhood in the nineteenth-century. The first part of my essay will therefore trace the origin and development of these debates in order to provide a context for the critical interpretation of the stories that occurs in the second part of the essay. I will show how Rushdie's postcolonial perspective draws from and complicates colonial and national allegories of Indian womanhood in a complicated rewriting of the old tropes of woman, nation, and desire.

Like Saleem Sinai, the egotistical narrator of *Midnight's Children*, the various narrators of Rushdie's *East, West Stories* serve as symbolic representations of the postcolonial nation-state. The six stories under discussion represent a diverse collection of narrators ranging from the idiosyncratic Teacher Sahib of 'The Free Radio' to the more 'objective' third-person narrators of 'Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies', 'Chekov and Zulu' and 'The Prophet's Hair'. Although some narrators are easier to dismiss than others, all six narratives are complicit in their desire to narrate the story of the nation and its women in an allegorical format. Thus, in all these stories narrative desire for closure is paralleled by a national impulse towards wholeness. This implicit fear of fragmentation can be traced to British colonial policies that helped fuel Hindu/Muslim enmity and finally resulted in the partition of the country. The colonial rhetoric of British India can best be understood within the context of Edward Said's description of Orientalism. Said points out that the study of the 'Orient' was premised on 'a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "Us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "Them")' (43). His comment about the 'Orient' can, with appropriate modifications, be extended to symbolic representations of all non-Western countries described in colonial discourse. Ania Loomba points out that, 'this opposition is crucial to European self-conception: if colonised people are irrational, Europeans are rational, if the former are barbaric, sensual, and lazy, Europe is civilisation itself, with its sexual appetites under control and its dominant ethic of hard work' (47). This kind of binary thinking results in what Abdul JanMohammad calls a 'Manichean allegory' which defines

'the putative superiority of the European' against 'the supposed inferiority of the native' (82).

As Ania Loomba points out, the projection of colonial desire on to the native body resulted in very different representations of the gendered body. The 'Oriental' male 'was effeminised and portrayed as homosexual or else depicted as a lusty villain from whom the virile but courteous European could rescue the native (or the European) woman' (152). Loomba continues, '[a]nother favorite figure in colonial insertion was that of the burning widow or sati.... Eastern royal or upper class/caste women being watched by, consorting with, and being saved by, European men is a feature of colonial narratives from the seventeenth century to the present' (153).⁵ Brown bodies thus serve as a fantasy site enabling the projection of very different colonial desires as the wholeness of the colonial master comes to be experienced at the cost of fragmented native bodies. Consequently, the colonial project can be summed up in Gayatri Spivak's comment that in colonial discourse 'brown women [are] saved by white men from brown men' (296). Because this allegorical trope gained so much importance in colonial India, nationalist leaders and freedom fighters felt compelled to address the problem of the colonised nation through the 'problem' of its women.

In nineteenth-century India there were two dominant streams of colonial thought concerning Indian women. The Orientalists or Indologists such as Max Mueller believed that Indian culture had declined after the Indo-Aryans, while Anglicists such as Macaulay and John Stuart Mill claimed that it had always been primitive and rude. Influenced as they were by colonial ideals, Indian nationalists found themselves forced to choose between two problematic representations of their national culture and finally opted for the less-negative representation by reviving the image of the high-caste Aryan woman of ancient India. Uma Chakravorti writes that the nineteenth-century Indian intelligentsia 'could regard itself as a product of an "exhausted" culture but, through the work of the Orientalists, could simultaneously feel optimistic that despite the present circumstances they were representatives of a culture which had been "organically disrupted by historical circumstance but was capable of revitalisation"' (32). The efforts of this intellectual elite gave rise to the idea of a Victorian middle-class Hindu gentlewoman who was made to represent the moral core of the Indian nation. Any woman who deviated from this ideal was promptly written out of nationalist discourse about the country. Because the Indian nationalists saw English women as corrupt and immoral, they were determined to protect the spirituality and purity of Hindu women from their licentious counterparts. And because the middle-class Hindu woman had come to represent all that was best about Indian culture, the sanctity of the latter had to be protected by the demarcation of social space into 'ghar' (home) and 'bahir' (world). According to the nationalist point of view:

The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world — and woman [is] its representation. (Chatterjee 120)

Thus, in nationalist discourse woman came to be equated with home and home came to mean the *true* India that needed to be rescued from its tainted Western trappings.

This conflation of a certain kind of woman's body with the Indian nation is made most evident in the allegorical representation of 'Bharat Mata' or Mother India, which was born in nineteenth-century Hindu texts like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anand Math* (1882). As Nalini Natarajan points out, "'Mother India' is an enormously powerful cultural signifier, gaining strength not only from atavistic memories from the Hindu epics, Sita, Sati, Savitri, Draupadi, but also its use in moments of national (typically conflated with Hindu) cultural resurgence' (84). In her essay, 'Woman, Nation, and Narration in *Midnight's Children*', Natarajan describes the moment of Saleem Sinai/India's birth as a time when 'the midnight of Indian independence is represented through refraction of the colors of the Indian flag on to nation celebrations ... and the bodies of women giving birth' (76). Later, in the same essay, Natarajan shows how the assumption of the predominantly Hindu image of Mother India was appropriated by a Muslim woman, Saleem's mother, in order to safeguard the idea of a secular India and to prevent a communal riot.⁶ Natarajan's reading of the women characters in *Midnight's Children* foreshadows the allegorical representation of women in Rushdie's *East, West* stories.

Although, with the exception of the thief's widow and Mrs. Zulu, none of the women in the stories are mothers, two of them — Miss Rehana and Certainly-Mary — are ayahs⁷ and function as surrogate mothers to the nation's *male* children. Despite the fact that the women in these stories belong to different religions — Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Catholic — they are linked by the idealised image of Mother India that each of them represents. By taking the predominantly Hindu image of Mother India and secularising it, Rushdie's vision implies the national ideal of a secular India even as it is complicit with the way in which this ideal foregrounds motherhood to the exclusion of other kinds of gendered experience. For the purpose of this essay I will begin by examining the two stories that most challenge and complicate paradigms of national desire, 'Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies' and 'The Courter'; then examine the brief interjections made by 'The Harmony of the Spheres' and 'Chekov and Zulu'; and finally, look at the two texts which most closely follow the victim/victimiser paradigm found in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* — 'The Free Radio' and 'The Prophet's Hair'.

'Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies' which is set in contemporary Pakistan, narrates the friendship between an old con artist called Muhammad Ali and a young woman, Miss Rehana. Muhammad Ali preys upon women who come to the British Consulate to obtain visas that will allow them to be united with their husbands in England. Miss Rehana's husband lives in Bradford, England, and she comes to the British Consulate to acquire a visa that will allow her to join him there. Her marriage had been arranged by her parents and Miss Rehana has not seen her husband, Mustafa Dar, since the wedding, which took place when she was still a child. Muhammad Ali initially wants to dupe Miss Rehana into paying for a fake British passport but he is charmed by her beauty and tries to help her instead. The Consulate officials deny Miss Rehana her visa because they think she is lying about her marriage to Mustafa Dar. Disappointment leads Miss Rehana to confide in Muhammad Ali. She tells him of her marriage to Mustafa Dar and her rejection at the hands of the Consulate before returning home to Lahore.

'Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies' critiques colonial and national representations of women by showing their inability to speak for the gendered native subject. Although the story is narrated by a third-person narrator, his narrative tells the story from the perspective of Muhammad Ali and does not provide any insight into the character of Miss Rehana. At the very beginning of the story Muhammad Ali makes it clear that Miss Rehana is different to and better than all other women. For instance, he observes that while Miss Rehana comes to the Consulate on her own, his 'clients' arrive clinging to fathers and brothers. While Miss Rehana is beautiful and independent and, indeed, the symbol of all that is best about Muslim womanhood, the 'Tuesday women'⁸ appear as an undifferentiated mass who are worthy only of Muhammad Ali's deception. Muhammad Ali's narrative also foregrounds the fact that it is Miss Rehana's beauty that turns her into a symbol of ideal womanhood; however, Miss Rehana demystifies this masculinist idealisation of beauty by calling the public bus on which she travels to the Consulate, a beautiful one. Miss Rehana's observation reinforces Rudolf Beck's analysis of the way in which Rushdie plays with readerly expectations. Beck points out that Rushdie uses a pattern of demystification to 'subvert conventional essentialist notions of East and West' (365). He observes that:

The title ['Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies'] in itself will surely raise expectations of a certain kind: readers might conceivably anticipate a parable or moral fable — perhaps, because of the rubies, in an oriental or exotic setting. However, the first paragraph reads more like the beginning of a 'slice-of-life' story: 'On the last Tuesday of the month, the dawn bus, its headlamps still shining, brought Miss Rehana to the gates of the British Consulate. It arrived pushing a cloud of dust, veiling her beauty from the eyes of strangers until she descended'. (365)

Beck's comment alerts the reader that there may be more to Miss Rehana than the 'beauty' that Muhammad Ali sees.

Once unveiled, Miss Rehana's beauty seduces Muhammad Ali. He wants to give her a fake passport that will allow her entry into Great Britain and prevent her from facing indignity at the hands of the Consulate men. It is important to realise at this juncture that Muhammad Ali's offer is based on a national desire to preserve the gendered citizen's body from the indignities of invasive immigration procedures that destroy the sanctity of the female ideal. Avtar Brah writes that in the '70s and '80s:

Reports of harassment at the hands of the immigration service were widespread. There were cases of Asian women arriving in Britain being subjected to 'virginity tests' and of Asian children undergoing x-ray examinations in order to establish their age. Asian marriages involving a fiancé from the sub-continent were likely to be subjected to acutely embarrassing forms of surveillance for the first year. (39)

British Consulates around the world naturally modelled their pattern of investigation on the immigration service in England, and Muhammad Ali and Miss Rehana's description of the British Consulate in Pakistan suggests that it was no exception to the rule. Muhammad Ali's awareness of immigration procedure makes him plead with Miss Rehana not to go into the Consulate building and 'lose her pride'. However, as I have already pointed out, he is more concerned with protecting the national sense of honour that her body symbolises than with her feelings as an individual. Miss Rehana, being a good colonised subject brought up on ideals of integrity and fair play, turns down his offer and the British Consulate both desecrates and rejects Muhammad Ali's nationalist offering of womanhood. While Miss Rehana's beauty can charm Pakistani men — the bus driver, Muhammad Ali, and the Consulate guards — the officials working for the Consulate are immune to her charms and reject her visa application. As far as the British immigration officials are concerned Miss Rehana is no different than the Tuesday women. To them, she is just another deceitful native trying to trick her way into a better life in England.

Thus, the postcolonial woman's body becomes meaningful not in terms of her desire but in terms of patriarchal national and colonial desires. Miss Rehana is caught between her parents' desire to have her marry an older man who will protect her in times of need, Muhammad Ali's idealisation of her body as a national symbol, and the Consulate's rejection of that body based on its inability to provide them with marital details. In her interview with the Consulate officials Miss Rehana rewrites not only the geography of her husband's body and home, but also the national geography of England itself. Her inability to recognise the distinguishing marks on her husband's body is the result of her having no real knowledge of the man she married when she was nine years old, but the consul officials, conditioned as they are by 'love marriages' in the West, read her mistakes as a sign of dissembling and think her a liar. Miss Rehana's accidental redrawing of the map of England indirectly refers to the large numbers of third-world immigrants who take over sections of the country, remaking England in the image of the colony it

once occupied. Both factors combine to influence the Consulate officials and lead them to deny Miss Rehana's visa application. Thus, Miss Rehana remains trapped between various competing discourses, which makes it difficult to read agency into her actions. Critics like Rudolf Beck and Rocio Davis infer that Miss Rehana deliberately misled the Consulate officials because she had no desire to join her husband in the West.⁹ However, this reading is problematic because it marks Miss Rehana as an idealised 'modern' South Asian woman with no desire to be trapped by arranged marriages or by colonial seductions and completely ignores specific narrative references to 'the anxiety in her voice' and 'the bitterness that had infected her smile' (8–15). When Muhammad Ali begins to warn Miss Rehana about the indignities that she will be forced to suffer once she enters the Consulate gates, her hands begin to 'flutter', she loses her composure and has to 'discipline' her voice. Later, the bitter smile she wears when she tells Muhammad Ali that her visa application was refused, suggests that she was not happy with the outcome or in control of the procedures that led to it. Davis' and Beck's reading grants Miss Rehana agency and completely ignores the fact that the ultimate decision to go or stay is not hers to make. Their reading, consequently, provides an uncritical endorsement of Muhammad Ali's conviction that Miss Rehana is happy to return to Lahore to 'work in a great house, as ayah to three good boys' who 'would have been sad to see [her] leave' (15).

At the end of his narrative Muhammad Ali returns Miss Rehana to his nationalist objectification as 'the smile on her face remains the happiest thing he had ever seen in his hard, unloving life' (16). Even though the third-person narrator describes Muhammad Ali as an aging con man infatuated by a young girl, the story's conclusion does not contradict or undermine Ali's sentimental objectification of Miss Rehana. Nevertheless, there is enough textual evidence to indicate that Muhammad Ali's interpretation is clearly as limited as that of the consular officials. The Consulate deems Miss Rehana unfit to be a British citizen and sends her back to Ali's adoring gaze. His narrative returns her to her nurturing role as surrogate mother to home and nation, but the reader never knows what she wants. There is no reason to rejoice in the fact that Miss Rehana has exchanged one form of servitude (to a husband she does not know) for another (as ayah to three young sons of a wealthy family). Miss Rehana's independent journey to the Consulate, her refusal to be tricked by Muhammad Ali or to ask for his assistance, and her obvious discomfort at the hands of the immigration officials suggest a subjectivity that rejects the easy containment provided by the end of the story. Muhammad Ali's narrative renders Miss Rehana a transparent object of nationalist desire but her desires remain outside the discourses of nation and empire that compete for her.

While 'Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies' emphasises the failure of colonial and national discourses to read the gendered subject, in 'The Courter' these discourses are actively threatened by Certainly-Mary's desires. 'The Courter',

which appears to be the most autobiographical of all the stories in *East, West*, presents the reader with two competing narratives: the adolescent narrator's coming of age read against the love story between his 60-year-old ayah, Certainly-Mary, and her East European porter/courter, Mecir. The narrator resents having to share his ayah with another man, particularly since their courtship reinforces his sense of alienation in postcolonial England. As with all Rushdie narratives, in 'The Courter' female desire is subsumed by narrative desire. When Certainly-Mary begins to develop a voice of her own, she threatens the narrator to such an extent that she has to be physically returned to India.

At the beginning of the story the narrator emphasises his closeness to Certainly-Mary by stressing that she 'did as much as [his] mother to raise [him]' (177). In fact, she is more effective than the narrator's own mother when it comes to dealing with his alcoholic father. Because of her age, Certainly-Mary can assume the national symbol of Bharat Mata, or Mother India, to instill fear and respect into the patriarch of the family. Her performance of maternal identity becomes doubly subversive as it involves a Catholic woman taking over a predominantly Hindu image in a move that reinforces a secular Indian identity.

However, Mary's identification with the national symbol of Mother India is threatened by her love affair with Mecir. Even though the narrator emphasises the absence of any kind of sexuality in the Certainly-Mary/Courter relationship, their love opens up a third space for Mary, which is removed from both racist and national pedagogy. While the outside world is made up of racist thugs and dangerous elevators, and the narrator's parents make Certainly-Mary sleep on the floor in the children's room, in Mecir's little apartment she can drink tea, watch television, and play chess. Their relationship also challenges the allegorical role of Mary as mother figure to the adolescent Rushdie and his family and becomes doubly threatening in the face of the narrator's inability to find love and acceptance at home or in England.

Consequently, the narrative voice and the narrator complement each other as they try to find ways to undermine the love story between Certainly-Mary and Mecir. Name-calling becomes the narrator's way of asserting his superiority to 'Jumble Aya' and 'Mixed-Up'. The narrator's ability to call Mecir and Certainly-Mary names is an indication of both his class privilege and, by extension, his fluency in English. However, while the narrator can use his prowess with the English language to lord it over his ayah and her courter, both he and his father are faulted for 'incorrect language usage' by the British themselves. The narrator complains, '[m]y schoolfellows tittered when in my Bombay way I said "brought up" for upbringing (as in "where was your brought-up?") and "thrice" for three times and "quarter-plate" for side plate and "macaroni" for pasta in general' (185). The narrator's father, despite his role of tyrant at home, is slapped by an English sales girl for confusing 'nipples' with 'teats'. While England emasculates the narrator and his father, Certainly-Mary and Mecir shake off the name calling and

teasing with a good natured shrug and a '[t]hese English ... aren't they the limit?' (184).

In fact, far from being to her disadvantage, it was Mary's lack of fluency in English, that allowed her and her porter, whom she re-names 'courter' — because 'English was hard for Certainly-Mary.... The letter p was a particular problem, often turning into an f or c' (176) — that draws Mecir to her. And later, when the former Grandmaster teaches her chess it becomes, 'their private language ... When they played, he handicapped himself, he told her her best moves and demonstrated their consequences, drawing her step by step, into the infinite possibilities of the game' (194–95).

The narrator is particularly jealous of their relationship because of his failure in love. Dismissed by Rozalia, a Polish girl he fancied, for not being a 'real man', he seeks refuge in love songs heard over the radio. On a parallel level, Certainly-Mary chooses virtual reality over the real world and infantilises her employers by identifying them with cartoon characters like the Flintstones. She also dismisses politicians like Enoch Powell with a turn of the television knob. However, the racism of the outside world keeps returning to haunt the narrator and Certainly-Mary.

The narrator's identification with the universality of love is problematised by the racist subtext to some rock music which reinforces his insider/outsider position. For instance, the thugs who harass the narrator's mother and Certainly-Mary sport Rolling Stones and Beatles hair cuts; a style that suggests the anti-immigrant excesses of certain British youth sub cultures.¹⁰ Even as the narrator's desire to turn white manifests itself in an adolescent identification with rock music, his postcolonial subject position points to the ambivalent nature of his desire.

When Certainly-Mary and the narrator's mother are attacked by racist thugs, it is Mecir who comes to their rescue. The Indian gentry and the narrator's father choose to use their class privilege to absent themselves from any unpleasantness and when Certainly-Mary and Mecir come to the narrator for help, despite his class privilege he says he can do nothing to help them. Because the ayah and her courter stand on the lowest rung of the immigrant ladder, they are particularly vulnerable to racist attacks and while they can withstand discrimination at the hands of the narrator's family, they become vulnerable to Skinhead violence.

The transformative nature of their relationship is curtailed both by racism in England and by the narrative desire that it threatens. Certainly-Mary's decision to return home to India suggests a rejection of both the courter and the narrator. However, it soon becomes clear that by removing Certainly-Mary from her relationship with her courter, the narrator is once again able to possess her as a symbol of home and nation. She becomes the India that he longs for and is in exile from. While both she and the narrator are put in a position where they are forced to choose one identity over another, Certainly-Mary and Mecir come up with a relationship that can be defined as both/and rather than either/or. Their

relationship provides a third space: one that doesn't have to be defined by England or India. However, the fragility of their relationship is revealed when Mecir is unable to recover fully from his injuries and when Certainly-Mary decides to return to India. After choosing India over England, she is never again worried by 'heart-trouble' and at the time of the story is still going strong at ninety-one. Mecir also conveniently disappears from the narrative. Thus, while the love story between Certainly-Mary and Mecir tells the reader more about female desire and subjectivity than any of the other *East, West* narratives, their relationship is threatening to the narrator precisely because it falls outside the parameters of narrative/national desire. After a brief exploration of their relationship, the narrator conflates Certainly-Mary's feelings with his own when he writes:

So it was England that was breaking her heart, breaking it by not being India. London was killing her, by not being Bombay. And Mixed-Up? I wondered. Was the courter killing her, too, because he was no longer himself? Or was it that her heart, roped by two different loves, was being pulled both East and West, whinnying and rearing, like those movie horses being yanked this way by Clark Gable and that way by Montgomery Clift, and she knew that to live she would have to choose? (209)

However, as my argument has shown, Certainly-Mary's desires are very different to the narrator's and hence they need to be neutralised. By using the outside forces of racism to destroy the Certainly-Mary/Mecir love affair, the narrative enables Mecir to disappear and Certainly-Mary to return home where she can once more become the symbolic representation of national/narrative desire. In this way Certainly-Mary's rejection of England as manifested in her desire to go home becomes compensation for England's rejection of the narrator. Certainly-Mary's story can also be read as a continuum of Miss Rehana's in 'Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies' as both women are returned 'home' to the nation-state, when they endeavor to move, both literally and symbolically, away from it.

In 'The Harmony of the Spheres' which, like 'The Courter', is also set in postcolonial England, Mala, the narrator Khan's wife, becomes yet another symbol for home when Khan tells the reader 'the warm dark tides of the Indian Ocean rose nightly in her [Mala's] veins' (140).¹¹ Rejected and humiliated by his English girlfriend, Laura, Khan turns to 'serious, serene Mala, non-smoking, non-drinking, vegetarian, drug-free, lonely Mala from Mauritius' (129) for comfort, but finally finds wholeness in the arms of, Lucy, the wife of his best friend, Eliot Crane. Khan keeps his feelings for Lucy a secret from Eliot and Mala but, in an ironic twist, at the end of the story after Eliot's hallucinations lead him to commit suicide, Khan stumbles upon Eliot Crane's diary and discovers that Eliot and Mala had been lovers.

Khan fell in love with Lucy for the first time when they were children playing on Juhu beach. Lucy's Anglo-Indian background and colonial heritage transform her into his object of desire, for, in embracing her, he is able to embrace all England and forget the indignities suffered because of his colonised past. Khan's feelings

for Lucy represent a very Fanonian sense of the desire of the native man for the white woman. In voicing the desire of the colonised man Fanon writes, 'I wish to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white* ... who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man' (63). The colonial project determines postcolonial desire by inflecting it with a need to turn white and whole. In the case of 'The Harmony of the Spheres' the native home or nation — that is, Mala — is betrayed for the English woman Lucy who holds out the promise of wholeness for Rushdie's narrator. Lucy's Anglo-Indian past also enhances her attractiveness for it implicates her in the narrator's postcolonial history, enabling him to embrace both East and West in her. While both he and Mala are 'aliens' in England, his derisory attempts at parodying Mala's English and his affair with Lucy suggest the implicit superiority the postcolonial man feels in front of the postcolonial woman. Moreover, Khan's contemptuous dismissal of Lucy's American husband, whom she marries after Eliot dies, suggests a narrative inability to come to terms with his own rejection at her hands. The story ends on an ironic note when the reader and the narrator discover that the latter has been cuckolded by his wife, Mala, and Lucy's first husband, Eliot Crane. However, even as Mala's affair with Eliot provides an ironic rewriting of the narrator's love affair with Lucy, the only representation of the Mala-Eliot affair is seen in Eliot's diary. Mala confirms the affair but is both betrayed and silenced in the story. The reader has no idea why she and Eliot had the affair or why Eliot stayed married to Lucy instead of marrying Mala. Thus, the native woman once again appears as commodity in a patriarchal text which tells us more about cross-cultural male bonding and betrayal than about postcolonial female desire. Lucy becomes the privileged object of desire for both Khan and Eliot Crane and once again the brown woman is seen to occupy the lowest rung in the hierarchy of colonial/postcolonial masculine desire. However, Mala does have the literal and metaphoric last word in the story when with her simple statement, '[t]hose weren't fantasies' (146), she claims Eliot's diary for herself. Her words clearly point to the limitations of narrative/national desire in its ability to narrate and contain the postcolonial female subject. The postcolonial gendered body may be (mis)read and (mis)appropriated but always remains outside the limits of national/narrative desire and discourse.

Like the adolescent narrator of 'The Courter', Khan also seeks acceptance in Anglo-Saxon England through a 'white' partner. Unfortunately, Rozalia rejects the teenage protagonist of the former story for a 'real man', while Lucy's hasty second marriage forces Khan's feelings to remain unconsummated. However, while the protagonist in 'The Courter' can seek refuge in an unsullied image of Certainly-Mary who rejects Mecir and England for an idealised image of India, Khan finds that his idealised image of home (Mala) has betrayed him for the coloniser (Eliot). Thus, the national ideal of home found in 'Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies' and 'The Courter' changes in 'The Harmony of the Spheres' as Khan

finds himself betrayed not just by his best friend and his first love, but also by the idealised image of home and nation that he had grounded himself on.

'The Harmony of the Spheres' suggests the illusory nature of home and its ability to deceive. The actions of Certainly-Mary and Mala indicate that the postcolonial woman can stray away from the national ideal and therefore she needs to be locked into an allegorical representation of home that denies her any space for individual desire and agency. This monolithic representation of an idealised female figure is best seen in Zulu's wife who gives her husband five sons and ensures that he has 'a full heart ... a full house, a full belly, a full bed' (160).

The story 'Chekov and Zulu' is told by a third-person narrator and takes place in England in 1984 in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards. Zulu, a Sikh, who works as an undercover agent for the Indian government mingles with Sikh terrorists in England to try to find those implicated in planning the Prime Minister's assassination. Like the idealised national citizen he represents, Zulu puts the nation's welfare before his own ethnicity and gives up fellow Sikhs who have betrayed the Indian nation. However, after accomplishing his mission, he resigns in disapproval of the way in which the Indian government turns a blind eye to the atrocities perpetrated against Sikhs in India by the late prime minister's followers.

Like 'The Harmony of the Spheres', 'Chekov and Zulu' is a story about male bonding and betrayal. When Zulu goes undercover, his best friend Chekov begins to have doubts about his integrity and muses:

The Sikh community has always been thought loyal to the nation.... Backbone of the Army, to say nothing of the Delhi taxi service. Super-citizens, one might say, seemingly wedded to the national idea. But such ideas are being questioned now you must admit; there are those who would point to the comb, bangle, dagger et cetera as signs of the enemy within.... It is possible ... that Zulu has boldly gone where no Indian diplomat has gone before.... Zulu is a better name for what some might allege to be a wild man.... For a suspected savage.... For a putative traitor. (152–53)

Chekov's speech is filled with innuendo in its representation of the Sikh as the native savage or the civilised man gone wild. However, when Mrs. Zulu speaks she contradicts Chekov's representation of her husband by pointing out that his Doon school pet name is Sulu and not Zulu. Rushdie writes:

The wife wept. 'Even the stupid name you could never get right. It was with S. "Sulu". So-so many episodes I have been made to see, you think I don't know? Kirk Spock McCoy Scott Uhura Chekov *Sulu*'. (153)

Chekov and Zulu's uncritical assumption of the persona of two *Star Trek* characters with a complete disregard for the television show's colonial implications emphasises their elite Doon school upbringing. Mrs. Zulu's preference for virtual reality, in the form of an American television show, to objectification in a racist,

nationalist pedagogy, is particularly ironic given that the colonial implications of *Star Trek* are translated into India's national impulse to eliminate its dissidents. Thus, Mrs. Zulu's subject position is ambivalent. On the one hand, she partakes of the colonial legacies promoted by her husband and Chekov, while on the other, like her husband, she is critical of the anti-Sikh national discourse promoted by the Indian government. Her own gendered desires, however, always remain sublimated to those of her country and her ethnicity. Even as she voices her discontent at the government's attitude towards her community, she remains subject to the national ideal of the perfect wife and mother. At the end of the story, the reader is told that Zulu 'had three more children, all of them boys, and remains happily married to this day' (169). Like Mala, in 'the Harmony of the Spheres', Mrs. Zulu remains in the margins of a story about male friendship and bonding.

Gendered voice and desire are further eliminated by the tight allegorical framework of the next two stories under discussion, 'The Free Radio' and 'The Prophet's Hair'. As with 'Chekov and Zulu', Rushdie emphasises the allegorical nature of these stories by situating them within the framework of specific historical events. While 'The Free Radio' criticises the ways in which 'national interest' marks the lives of individual citizens, in 'The Prophet's Hair' the larger good of the secular nation seems to take precedence over the lives of individual citizens.

'The Free Radio' narrates the events that lead to the seduction of a young rickshaw puller, Ramani, at the hands of a thief's widow as witnessed by the narrator, a retired village school teacher. Ramani gets sterilised in order to ensure that the thief's widow who already has five children, will never get pregnant again. His 'love' for the thief's widow also causes him to leave his village and go to Bombay to earn a fortune which will keep the thief's widow and her children in style. The story ends with a skeptical Teacher Sahib reading a letter that purports to be sent from Ramani in Bombay. In the letter Ramani stresses that he and the thief's widow are well and happy but Teacher Sahib remains unconvinced.

'The Free Radio' is clearly an allegory about the political excesses that took place in India during the Emergency years of 1975–77. Although the late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, had followed the liberal political style of her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, her government came to be known for corruption, upper-caste atrocities against lower-castes, communalism, and her son Sanjay Gandhi's unchecked power (Sunder Rajan 123). In June 1975 Indira Gandhi took the unprecedented step of declaring a state of Emergency under which civil liberties were suspended, press restrictions imposed, and members of the opposition imprisoned. The Emergency soon gained notoriety for mass arrests, sterilisation programmes, and the destruction of urban slums. Distressed at its implications, Indira Gandhi removed restrictions and called for fresh elections in 1977. However, the Emergency cost her the confidence of the people and the opposition party, the Janata Dal, won the 1977 elections, but when elections were held again in 1980, she swept back to power.

After visiting India in the post-Emergency years, Salman Rushdie wrote *Midnight's Children* using conversations that he had had with friends and acquaintances to criticise India's Emergency years. In 1984 Indira Gandhi won a law suit against Rushdie for the accusations he made against her in the novel but she was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards soon after.¹² In *Midnight's Children* Rushdie refers to Indira Gandhi as the 'witch' and the 'widow' — two epithets that he uses for the thief's widow in 'The Free Radio'. The first name refers to the wicked witch of the west who appears in Rushdie's favourite book *The Wizard of Oz*¹³ and symbolically represents the power of the castrating woman, while the second refers to the demise (in 1960) of the late Prime Minister's estranged husband, Feroze Gandhi, and the cultural misogyny with which Hindu widows are regarded in India. This misogyny can be seen in the unsympathetic attitude of the narrator towards the thief's widow in the parable, 'The Free Radio'. Not only does he deny her an identity by refusing to call her by her proper name, he also tells her to 'thank[ing] God that widow-burning is now illegal' (23). The correlation between the thief's widow and Indira Gandhi is further strengthened by the association of both women with the sterilisation camps that are set up in the retired teacher sahib's village. Ramani decides to be sterilised because the thief's widow does not want to have any more children, and because his vasectomy is in the 'national interest'. 'National interest' was the term used to justify the imposition of forced sterilisation programs and other controversial initiatives that were said to be in the interests of the vast majority of the Indian people who lived in small towns and villages.

In 'The Free Radio', Ramani falls prey to national rhetoric and becomes the perfect citizen who is willing to sacrifice his body for the good of the nation. In addition to serving the cause of 'national interest' and the desires of the thief's widow, Ramani decides to have a vasectomy because of the lure of the free radio that the government promises to those who undergo sterilisation. However, in the story, the promise of the free radio is never fulfilled and when Ramani goes into a sterilisation camp to ask for his 'free gift', he is roughed up and thrown out. This reinforces Teacher Sahib's belief that Indira Gandhi's promises, like those made by the thief's widow, are not to be trusted and leaves him skeptical about Ramani's happiness at the end of the story. The thief's widow's refusal to have more children connects her with Indira Gandhi who wanted to control her country's population through sterilisation programs. The connection between Indira Gandhi and the thief's widow is further tightened when the latter watches Ramani being beaten up by a group of thugs who closely resemble Sanjay Gandhi's 'goondas', but refuses to go to his assistance. Her gaze is reminiscent of that of the late Prime Minister whose giant hoardings loomed large over the people of her nation and in whose name vasectomies were performed on reluctant subjects.

The widow's body thus becomes the site for competing discourses about nationalism and modernity. On the most obvious level, we have the retired teacher's

'traditional' stance towards women exemplified in his reactionary attitude towards the thief's widow. The teacher's perspective shows how the national idealisation of motherhood elides the possibility of sexual desire on the part of the woman. The narrator finds the thief's widow's sexuality threatening and tells her to go and live, as befits her position in society, in a widows' ashram in Benaras. The thief's widow's characterisation as 'bad mother' is further reinforced by the fact that her 'rutputty shack' is frequented by men late at night. Her transgressions carry the betrayals of the earlier protagonists to an extreme, showing that if woman's actions are not tightly monitored her sexual desires will corrupt the national ideal of womanhood.

This denial of female sexuality can also be found in the case of the late Prime Minister whose national popularity was contingent upon her appropriation of the symbolic role of Mother of the Nation; a role which emphasised her maternal identity but simultaneously elided her sexuality. Sunder Rajan points out that, '[i]t was during the 1967 elections — when she was as yet only fifty — that Indira was first hailed as "Mother India". In a speech she said to her village audience, "Your burdens are relatively light because your families are limited and viable. But my burden is manifold because crores of my family are poverty-stricken and I have to look after them"' (110). Yet, in the midst of her popularity Indira Gandhi is said to have bemoaned her inability to have a private life (Sunder Rajan 107). The conflation of tradition and modernity can be seen in the Prime Minister's assumption of a traditional symbol of motherhood to win over the sympathies of the people along with a national discourse which emphasised technology (the free radio) and science (vasectomies) as key instruments to the modernisation of India. In Rushdie's short story, the thief's widow is reconstituted as the 'modern Indian woman' who asserts her choice to re-marry a younger man and take control over her sexuality by persuading Ramani to be sterilised and keeping her ability to bear children. Tradition also gets replaced by modernity as the radio begins to displace teacher sahib in the dissemination of news. Ramani, as the nation's model citizen, is slowly sucked into the virtual world created by radios and the Bombay film industry and refuses to listen to the gossip that circulates around the village about the thief's widow. Finally, both he and the thief's widow are reduced to texts in the national rhetoric of modernisation and urbanisation, and at the end of the story the traditional narrator is left reading a letter which says that 'the thief's widow was well and happy and getting fat, and life was filled with light and success and no-questions-asked alcohol' (32). Once again the widow's body is reduced to a symbolic signifier which, like the symbolic Prime Minister, prospers at the cost of Ramani and the nation's other male children.

Despite the obvious bias of the first-person narrator that allows the reader to take him even less seriously than the egotistical Saleem Sinai of *Midnight's Children*, 'The Free Radio' suggests only two options for the Indian woman. Either she goes to a widow's ashram or, as a symbol of modernity, she, like the

late Prime Minister, turns into a castrating woman or bad mother who deprives men of their manhood in the interests of modernity and progress. It is easy to dismiss Teacher Sahib's story as a totalitarian narrative that is as black and white as its representation of the thief's widow. In fact, there are moments when the narrative voice even questions its own bias as, for instance, when Teacher Sahib says, '[y]es, I know, I'm an old man, my ideas are wrinkled with age, and these days they tell me sterilisation and God knows what is necessary, and maybe I'm wrong to blame the widow as well — why not? Maybe all the views of the old can be discounted now, and if that's so, let it be' (30). These moments of doubt disrupt the teacher's narrative suggesting that there may be another way of reading the story. However, this other way proves as problematic as the first. Rushdie's critique of Emergency politics creates an allegory which equates women's rights and female desire with forcible castration and the loss of manhood. His negative image of the thief's widow subverts the nationalist allegory of a Mother India who must be worshipped and protected by her male subjects. In the post-independence India of Indira Gandhi's politics, woman turns into a castrating mother who deprives Indian men of their manhood. National wholeness is won at the cost of individual fragmentation. The thief's widow becomes well and fat while Ramani works so hard that he dissolves until he is nothing but a spokesperson for the national rhetoric spewed out by Indira Gandhi's government and endorsed by the thief's widow. At the end of the story the thief's widow and Teacher Sahib are silenced and we are left with Ramani's 'voice' as it is mediated through a professional letter writer who tells us that all is well with the rickshaw puller and the thief's widow, and by extension, with the state of the nation.

In 'The Prophet's Hair' the female protagonist Huma falls prey to discourses of tradition and modernity in much the same way that the thief's widow does. However, while the latter appears as a castrating woman whose power must be denied in the interests of mankind, Huma is the modern, secular gendered subject who must be saved from fundamentalist Islamic discourses. The story is told by a third-person narrator and takes place in Kashmir, a region that has been disputed territory between India and Pakistan since 1947. In 1699 a Kashmiri merchant bought a hair of the Prophet Muhammad and enshrined it in the Hazrat Bal mosque as a sacred relic. The mosque became a pilgrim site and many people came from all over the world to worship there. On December 26th, 1963 the hair was stolen. This led to Hindu-Muslim riots in the valley until the relic was suddenly miraculously found in the gardens of the mosque on January 4th, 1964. Muslims claimed that Hindus had stolen the relic while India accused Pakistan of attempting to destabilise conditions in Kashmir.

In Rushdie's story Hashim, a Muslim moneylender, finds the relic and instead of returning it to the mosque keeps it as part of his collection. The relic wreaks vengeance on Hashim and his family by turning the moneylender into a religious fanatic. His daughter Huma hires a thief to steal the relic from Hashim so that

things may return to normal. Unfortunately, their plan backfires resulting in the death of the thief and the destruction of Hashim's family.

At an initial glance Hashim reminds the reader of Aadam Aziz (in *Midnight's Children*) who tries to modernise his wife and change her from a good Muslim girl to a modern Indian woman. While the experiment fails in the case of Aziz's wife, Hashim's family seems the perfect mix of old world values and new world modernity. Hospitality and courteousness blend with liberal views to create the parable of the perfect home or nation. However, we are soon informed that behind Hashim's harmonious façade lurks a feudal landlord who indulges in very un-Islamic conduct by extorting high interest rates from his debtors. He also goes against the strictures of the Koran when he engages in the theft of the prophet's hair and uses the fact that the prophet did not believe in relics to turn it into a collector's item. This act emphasises the choice of individual desire over secular citizenship. Hashim's duty as a good citizen was to return the prophet's hair to the mosque, but instead he chooses to be like the American millionaire and privilege his collector's greed over the nation's welfare. In a move reminiscent of Wilkie Collins' Orientalist novel, *The Moonstone* (1928), the curse of the prophet's hair results in the damnation of Hashim and his family. Hashim becomes a religious zealot insisting that his daughter always be veiled in public, leading his family in prayer five times a day, and ordering that the Koran be the only book read in his household. His religious fanaticism is supplemented by a disdain for and a rage against the modern secular family he has nurtured for so long. He reveals the presence of a mistress and tells his wife that upon his death in accordance with Islamic law she will receive only an eighth of his fortune. He calls his son an oaf and his daughter immoral, and when a debtor reminds him of the Koran's strictures against usury he tries to cut the man's arm off.

Hashim comes to represent two alternate extremes of tradition and modernity. On the one hand, his individual self-aggrandisement suggests a modernist involvement with the self and on the other, his religious fanaticism and his position of feudal landlord are reminiscent of more 'traditional' attitudes. In contrast to Hashim, there is Huma's uncle, the Muslim Deputy Commissioner of Police who embodies the good secular citizen: a Muslim sacrificing his life in the interests of a secular India. It is under his symbolic protection that Huma can enter the den of thieves to hire a thief to steal the relic from her father. In this way the secular nation state takes on the guise of the *Muslim* police man to protect its *Muslim* women from *Islamic* fundamentalism.

When Huma enters the thieves' den she is reminded of the childhood stories her nurse told her about the bogeyman, Sheikh Sin, who would steal her away if she were naughty. The sheikh's name reiterates the 'sinful' nature of Huma's transgression and Huma experiences a 'moment of involuntary nostalgia' when she remembers her secular childhood. This feeling gives her strength to challenge her father's decree that the Koran is the only 'true' book, and encourages her to

explore a realm of experience denied by fundamentalism but permitted by a secular nation. Her entry into the dark world of the thieves becomes symbolic of her entry into the world of her subconscious while her final meeting with Sheikh Sin suggests a rite of passage that allows her to confront her childhood demons and see the sheikh as the frail, old man that he is.

The conflict between tradition and modernity is further explored as Huma's body becomes a site for both sets of discourses. At the start of the book Huma represents the modern Muslim woman as well as the secular Indian woman who goes unveiled with her father's permission. Later her father insists that she become a good Muslim girl and veil herself, but she resists his instructions and suffers a beating. Her bruised, beautiful body then becomes symbolic of the way in which the modern Indian woman is marked by excessive religious zeal. It is also the spectacle of this bruised body combined with the institutional authority of the name of her uncle, the police inspector, that allows her to be untouched in the thieves' den. Rushdie describes Huma's entry into the thief's den in this way:

The young woman [Huma] added: 'I should say that I am carrying no money, nor am I wearing any jewelry items. My father has disowned me and will pay no ransom if I am kidnapped; and a letter has been lodged with the Deputy Commissioner of Police, my uncle, to be opened in the event of my not being safe at home by morning. In that letter he will find full details of my journey here, and he will move Heaven and Earth to punish my assailants' Her exceptional beauty, which was visible even through the enormous welts and bruises disfiguring her arms and forehead, coupled with the oddity of her inquiries, had attracted a sizable group of curious onlookers, and because her little speech seemed to them to cover just about everything, no one attempted to injure her in any way. (37)

As her trip to the thieves' den and her willingness to reward Sheikh Sin with the family jewels reveal, Huma is clearly willing to give up the name and tradition that her father represents for the good of a secular home and nation. Later in the story when Sheikh Sin steals the prophet's hair and Hashim kills Huma in a case of mistaken identity, Huma's letter to her uncle reveals the religious fanaticism that is responsible for the ruin of her family. All those implicated in the desecration of the sacred relic are destroyed, the sheikh's wife regains her eyesight and her faith, and the sheikh's sons who had been mutilated in the interest of profit are made whole once again. Thus, in this parable wholeness and faith are clearly privileged over economic gain. The prophet's hair is restored to its rightful place in the mosque and Hindu-Muslim fighting comes to an end. Huma's uncle is left with the duty of punishing the offenders, restoring the relic, mourning the dead, and taking care of the sick. In Rushdie's allegory of the nation-state the excesses of the fundamentalist home are punished and the secular modern nation-state has the last word through its idealised representative, Huma's uncle. The dead Huma remains the romanticised representative of the modern, gendered subject slain by the excesses of Islamic fundamentalism.

Like her uncle, Huma represents an idealised image of the secular citizen. She is intelligent, beautiful, and independent, and consequently, like her counterpart Miss Rehana in 'Good Advice', a romanticised representation. She is, however, also desexualised and her desires always seem to be in complete accordance with those of the postcolonial nation-state. Even though her foray into the thieves' den is, in many ways, reminiscent of a quest narrative with Huma playing a traditionally male role, her thievery is licensed by her desire to protect the integrity of the secular nation-state. Huma's attempted theft connects her with the thief's widow in 'The Free Radio' and emphasises the need for female manipulation in a patriarchal world. The idea of subterfuge also links her with Sheikh Sin's widow in 'The Prophet's Hair' whose 'blind eyes never opened' until her husband had fled (56). This line hints at the potential for masquerade for, while it is true that the sheikh's wife was blind, it is also possible that in the course of events she may have regained her sight and was deliberately keeping that fact from her husband. Thus, even as Huma's representation is consistently romanticised, her penchant for subterfuge suggests that, like Mala in 'The Harmony of the Spheres', she too has the potential to deceive.

In conclusion, it appears that when rebellious women who threaten the narrative framework and nationalist desires of their stories are returned 'home', their dissident desires can continue to deceive and betray. Even as the male narrators and characters consistently try to inscribe meaning on to the textual representations of the women, the latter's desires interrupt and challenge patriarchal naming practices. Miss Rehana's desires remain outside the British Consulate and Muhammad Ali's representations of her; Certainly-Mary's love for Mecir suggests that she wants more than a maternal identity for herself; Mala's affair with Eliot highlights her husband's inability to know her; and even Mrs. Zulu has Chekov wondering whether she is collaborating with her husband to betray the Indian government. At the cost of sounding cynical, in Rushdie's schema it appears that the only good gendered subject is a dead one. The dead Huma remains a tragic victim of religious excesses and a romanticised abstraction of the gendered citizen. Her opposite is the thief's widow, whose allegorical identity is reinforced by the absence of a proper name. The thief's widow is the perfect embodiment of the castrating woman and 'The Free Radio' an excellent illustration of the chaos that ensues when a woman's desires are not kept in check.

While 'The Prophet's Hair' and 'The Free Radio' fit the victim/victimiser paradigm set up in Rushdie's earlier works, the other stories suggest an in-between space made up of subversion and resistance. This space is worth studying because it highlights the inability of allegorical style and national desire to speak for women and alerts the reader to a need for other ways of learning about gendered desire and identity. While Huma and the thief's widow, like their counterparts in *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, are domesticated by the nationalist excesses of their narratives, Certainly-Mary, Miss Rehana, Mala,

and Mrs. Zulu refuse such domestication and emphasise that gendered desire lives outside of, and even in opposition to, nationalist objectification. Their desires are no less important or meaningful than national ones, but are more difficult to locate because they are so often obscured by patriarchal frameworks of meaning. My reading has sought to show how the traces of desire and subjectivity found in these stories subvert their narrative's allegorical structure and reveal more about the nature of gendered experience than their narrators are willing to acknowledge and emphasise the need for alternate re-presentations of women's experience in South Asia.

NOTES

- ¹ Like Aijaz Ahmad, I believe that we live in one world, not three (1992a 103) and that labels like 'first' and 'third' force arbitrary homogeneity on very diverse parts of the world. Consequently, even though these terms are necessary and valid in the context of my argument, I use them under erasure. I use the idea of the first-world reader to describe a *kind* of reader who is well versed in the postmodern aesthetic Rushdie uses but who is less aware of the historical nuances of his texts. While Rushdie has always been met with overwhelming success in the Western academy, his reception in India and Pakistan has been more ambivalent. Rushdie's recent comment in *The New Yorker* (1997) that the best Indian writing is happening in English is a case in point. First-world readers unaware of the richness of contemporary regional writing in India took the comment at face value but postcolonial intellectuals around the world took issue with Rushdie's claim and the way in which it contributed to the hegemonic role played by English in the world today.
- ² See Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism'.
- ³ To date there have been two scholarly essays on Salman Rushdie's *East, West*: Rocio G. Davis' 'Salman Rushdie's *East West*: Palimpsests of Fiction and Reality', and Rudolf Beck's 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind'. Davis explores the ways in which 'the creation of cultural and generic constructs ... constantly cancel each other out to reveal new versions of the same' (90), while Beck examines the stylistic techniques that Rushdie uses to deconstruct conventional notions of East and West. Neither essay touches on the issue of gender in *East, West Stories*.
- ⁴ In June 1975 the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, declared the nation to be under a state of Emergency. Civil liberties were suspended and restrictions were imposed on the press. The Emergency was called off in 1977. The Emergency is further described in the section of this essay that deals with 'The Free Radio'.
- ⁵ Critics who interrogate Orientalism include Lata Mani and Malek Alloula. See Lata Mani's discussion of sati in 'Cultural Theory, Colonial Texts: Reading Eyewitness Accounts of Widow Burning'. Also, see *The Colonial Harem* by Malek Alloula. Alloula contends that the postcards of Algerian women that French soldiers sent home to France do not 'represent Algeria and the Algerian woman but rather the Frenchman's phantasm of the Oriental female and her inaccessibility behind the veil in the forbidden harem' (Harlow xiv).
- ⁶ The conflation of woman with nation that Natarajan discusses is exemplified in the popular film *Mother India* (1957). Natarajan writes, 'In this archetypal film of nationalism, the Muslim identity of the actress who played the recognisably Hindu character symbolising the nation is at once appropriated and emptied of significance.'

The main actress who played Mother India was the Muslim actress Nargis, and she has always been associated in the minds of the public with Mother India. Her marriage to Hindu Sunil Dutt, who played her son in the film, cemented her image as Mother India. The cultural message of the film has always been seen as Hindu, with its echoes of Radha, Parvati, Sita, with all of the traditional self-sacrificing virtues ascribed to these women' (85).

- ⁷ Ayahs are maidservants who look after young English and middle-class Indian children.
- ⁸ Muhammad Ali calls the women who come to the British Consulate on the last Tuesday of every month to apply for visas 'Tuesday women'.
- ⁹ Beck writes, 'when she [Miss Rehana] returns smilingly from the Consulate, we find that she has profited from Mohammad's advice in an unexpected way. She has used his expert knowledge to ensure the failure of her application' (367). Davis also points out that 'Miss Rehana chooses to fail the test' (86).
- ¹⁰ See Dick Hebdige's discussion of British youth subculture in *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*.
- ¹¹ Mala is originally from India. Her ancestors were taken over to Mauritius to work as indentured laborers.
- ¹² See Inder Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi*, 180.
- ¹³ Rushdie's fascination with *The Wizard of Oz* can be seen in his book on the film that was authorised by BFI publishing. His short story 'At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers', can also be found in this book.

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